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# Father-child attachment among 5-6 year olds: A Survey Study

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## Abstract

The bond between fathers and children is essential for emotional and social development, especially in early childhood. This study aims to explore the level of attachment between fathers and their children aged 5–6 years in Parigi. A quantitative approach with a descriptive survey method was employed. Data were collected using a questionnaire based on the *Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment* (IPPA) theory, which includes dimensions of communication, trust, and alienation. The sample consisted of 172 father-child pairs from 13 kindergartens, although only 172 responses were analyzed. Results showed an average attachment score of 71.02 (SD = 5.81), with scores ranging from 60.50 to 82.30. Most relationships were categorized as medium attachment (45%) and were classified in the moderate attachment category, particularly within the score range of 62.51 to 71.6. Notably, none of the participants fell into the very high attachment category (≥83.72), indicating potential areas for strengthening emotional bonds. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions, such as parenting policies, school-based father involvement programs, and community-based mentoring initiatives aimed at enhancing fathers' emotional engagement and responsive caregiving.
**Keywords:** *Father-child attachment, Early Childhood, Parenting interventions*


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## Introduction

Early childhood (0-6 years) is a period of very rapid growth and development, so it requires appropriate stimulation for optimal growth and development. PAUD provides educational stimuli from birth to six years to support children's readiness to enter the next level of education (Maghfiroh & Shofia Suryana, 2021). Children's development includes various aspects such as religious values, social-emotional, motor, cognitive, and language (Yersel & Durualp, 2020), which are influenced by parental involvement. The emotional relationship between children and parents, known as attachment, is a bond that develops through meaningful interactions and becomes an important basis for child development (Indrawati & M. Maramis, 2022).

*Attachment* is a long-term emotional bond between individuals that has personal meaning to each other, and can provide a sense of security and comfort even though the attached figure is not physically present (Naveed et al., 2020). Attachment reflects the human drive to feel close and satisfied in warm interpersonal relationships (Ramadhanti et al., 2021a). This bond is mutually beneficial and characterized by emotional stability and security (Arianda et al., 2022), and it consistently creates comfort for both parties (Santoso & B, 2017). In the context of children, attachment describes a close relationship with a primary caregiver, such as a parent, who is a source of trust and security (Lyu, 2023). Attachment develops through responsive interactions between the

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child and the caregiver, who acts as a role model, which not only establishes trust in the caregiver but also in the wider social environment (El Qubro et al., 2023). Good attachment supports the development of children's social skills, self-esteem, emotional stability, and physical health.

Attachment theory was first introduced by John Bowlby, who stated that humans have an innate *behavioral system* known as the *attachment behavioral system*. This system encourages individuals, particularly children, to seek closeness with an attachment figure when they feel threatened or experience emotional distress (Bowlby, 1989). Mary Ainsworth, as cited in (Belsky,1988), reinforces this theory is reinforced by stating that attachment is formed gradually through repeated and responsive interactions between the child and the caregiver.

Attachment is a special emotional relationship that a child forms with a meaningful individual who can provide a sense of security, comfort, and consistent presence, such as a mother, father, caregiver, or other family member (Aryanti, 2015; Santrock, 2011) According to Bowlby's attachment theory, children are biologically driven to bond with an attachment figure who provides protection and security (Santrock, 2002). If a secure attachment is formed, the child will have a sense of trust in the world and a stable emotional foundation to explore their environment (Li, 2023).

The role of fathers in attachment formation is critical, as it contributes to the development of children's empathy and social skills (Brown & Aytuglu, 2020). Through active interactions such as physical play, children learn to recognize emotional signals, build self-confidence, and develop social skills. Father-child attachment also plays a strategic role in supporting emotion regulation; the father's emotional presence helps children recognize, express, and manage emotions effectively. Children who feel accepted by their fathers tend to be more confident, resilient to pressure, and able to control their emotions (Gottman J dan De Claire, 2003).

However, in practice, there are still various challenges in building a strong attachment between fathers and children. In the Parigi sub-district, for example, most fathers work as traders, which results in very limited interaction time with their children. Important activities such as playing together or giving appreciation to children are rarely done, resulting in low-quality father-child attachment.

Limitations in the father-child relationship can hurt children's emotional balance. Children with low attachment to their fathers tend to experience difficulties in managing emotions, such as irritability, frustration, or aggression towards peers (Nurhayani, 2020; Ramadhanti et al., 2021b). (G. G. Armsden & Greenberg, 2011) asserts that parental attachment, including fathers, can be assessed from aspects of communication, trust, and alienation, where open and responsive communication is key in forming healthy emotional relationships. Schaffer and Emerson's research (Bretherton, I., Golby, B., & Cho, 1997) shows that from the age of 18 months, children begin to form attachments with their fathers, especially if the father is actively involved in daily activities. Furthermore, father-child attachment is influenced by *internal working* models, mental *frameworks* that help children understand themselves and the social world. Children with secure attachment to their fathers generally have a positive view of themselves and others, which supports future social skills and emotion regulation (Papalia, D.E. & Olds, 1986).

Previous studies have highlighted the significant influence of mother–child attachment on early childhood development and independence. (Rahmatunnisa, 2019) explained that working mothers can still maintain attachment with their children through digital communication, such as video calls, which positively contributes to the child's overall development. Furthermore, (Amin et al., 2020) demonstrated that secure attachment to the mother significantly affects the independence of children aged 5–6 years. In addition, play-based training for mothers has been proven to significantly improve the quality of mother–child attachment, as reported by (Oktavianto et al., 2019). On the other hand, Sumariyeh and (Sumariyeh & Nurhayati, 2022) found that excessively strong attachment to the mother may correlate negatively with a child's independence, indicating that a mother's role in maintaining a balanced attachment is crucial to support the child's autonomy.

Nevertheless, the majority of existing studies have primarily focused on mother–child attachment. In contrast, research specifically examining father–child attachment remains limited, leaving a notable gap in the literature. Differing from previous studies that emphasize maternal

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attachment, this study provides a realistic portrayal of how limited emotional interaction between fathers and their children, often due to work-related demands, can impact the quality of their emotional bond. Accordingly, the findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of father–child attachment within a local context and offer a valuable foundation for efforts to strengthen the emotional role of fathers in early childhood parenting.

## Methodology

This research uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey method. The survey method is used to describe phenomena without providing treatment or manipulation of the variables studied (Sugiyono, 2022). The purpose of this method is to generalize findings based on samples, both large and small in size (Syajuananda & Tirtayani, 2022) . The main focus of this study is to determine the level of attachment between fathers and children aged 5-6 years in the Parigi area.

The population in this study included all 5-6-year-old children enrolled in kindergartens in Parigi, with a total of 301 pairs of fathers and children. The sampling technique used was *purposive random sampling*, taking into account the grouping of schools and the proportion of students from each kindergarten. This approach was chosen so that the research results could represent the population more accurately, avoid bias, meet statistical needs, and facilitate the generalization process (Sugiyono, 2022). The number of samples used was 172 pairs of fathers and children spread across 13 kindergartens.

The data collection tool used is a questionnaire or questionnaire. The questionnaire to measure father and child attachment was derived from the theory (G. G. Armsden & Greenberg, 2011). Parent and Peer Attachment Inventory (IPPA). Which consists of Communication, Trust, and Alienation. The validation test on the measuring instrument uses Material Expert ValidationLowshe Analysis, the conclusion of the assessment results from 24 statements Based on the results of calculations using the law she approach with a min value of 0.99, it shows that 17 statement items are considered essential and can be said to have a high level of agreement, see table 1.

**Tabel 1. Instrument validation**

| Barang | Korelasi total item yang dikoreksi | Keterangan |
|---|---|---|
| ITEM1 | ,748 | VALID |
| ITEM2 | ,825 | VALID |
| ITEM3 | ,760 | VALID |
| ITEM4 | ,812 | VALID |
| ITEM5 | ,656 | Invalid |
| ITEM6 | ,722 | VALID |
| ITEM7 | ,666 | Invalid |
| ITEM8 | ,783 | VALID |
| ITEM9 | ,787 | VALID |
| ITEM10 | ,054 | Invalid |
| ITEM11 | ,845 | VALID |
| ITEM12 | ,749 | VALID |
| ITEM13 | ,480 | Invalid |
| ITEM14 | ,633 | Invalid |
| ITEM15 | ,550 | Invalid |
| ITEM16 | ,804 | VALID |
| ITEM17 | ,721 | VALID |

Source: SPSS 25 Output for Windows, 2025

To measure stickiness, the researcher used a questionnaire measuring instrument consisting of 24 questions, but after going through the trial process, the empirical test results were tested again and resulted in 11 indicators that passed the reliability test, so that the remaining 11

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questions were used in data collection. The reliability test in this study used the Cronbach's Alpha technique, with a result of 0.897, which can be categorized as reliable.

Data grouping based on the measured attributes was carried out by adapting guidelines from (Azwar, 2012) using the category classification formula. The results of these calculations were used to determine the level of father-child attachment based on the total score of the following respondents in Table 2.

**Table 2. Categorization of father-child attachment**

| NO | VALUE | INTERVAL | CATEGORIES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 62.51 | ≤ 62.51 | Not very sticky |
| 2 | 71.6 | 62.51-71.6 | not sticky |
| 3 | 74.63 | 71.6 -74.63 | Simply |
| 4 | 83.72 | 74.63-83.72 | sticky |
| 5 | | ≥ 83.72 | Very sticky |

This study refers to the level of attachment of fathers and children aged 5-6 years. The data collected were analyzed descriptively and statistically to describe the data in the form of numbers and words regarding the attachment of fathers and children aged 5-6 years in Parigi.

## Results and Discussion

Providing emotional support helps children feel safe to helps build self-esteem. This research was carried out to the data collection stage. Based on the results of research related to the development of father-child attachment instruments for collecting father-child attachment data in Central Sulawesi, the results of research findings per indicator of ability in children are described as follows.
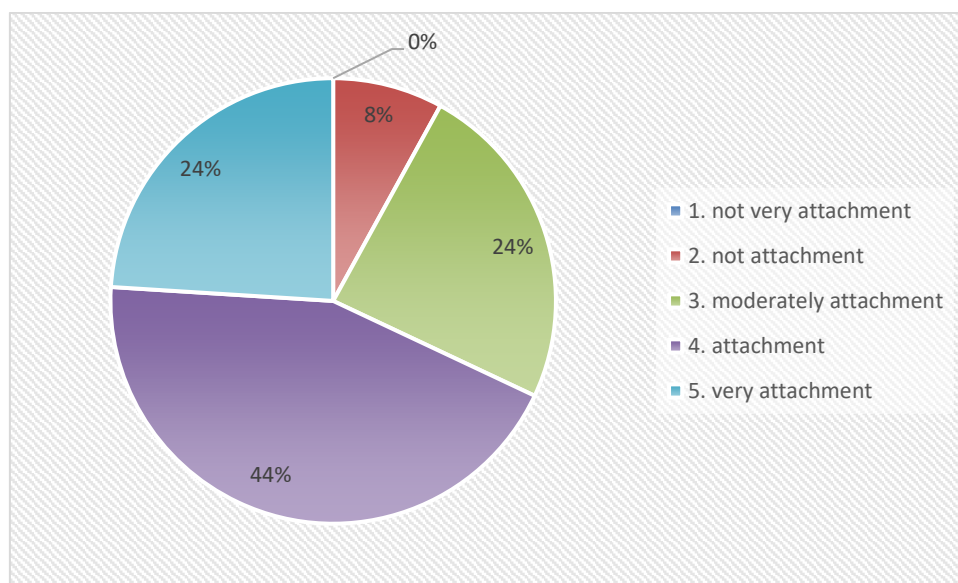
**Figure 1. Father is listening to a child's story**

This scale measures how often fathers listen to their children's stories, with 1 meaning"never" and 5 meaning "always". no one chose scale 1 (0%). A total of 14 fathers (8%) were on scale 2, 41 fathers (24%) on scale 3, 76 fathers (44%) on scale 4, and 42 fathers (24%) on scale 5. The totals show the full distribution of the frequency of fathers listening to children's stories, with the majority being on scales 4 and 5.

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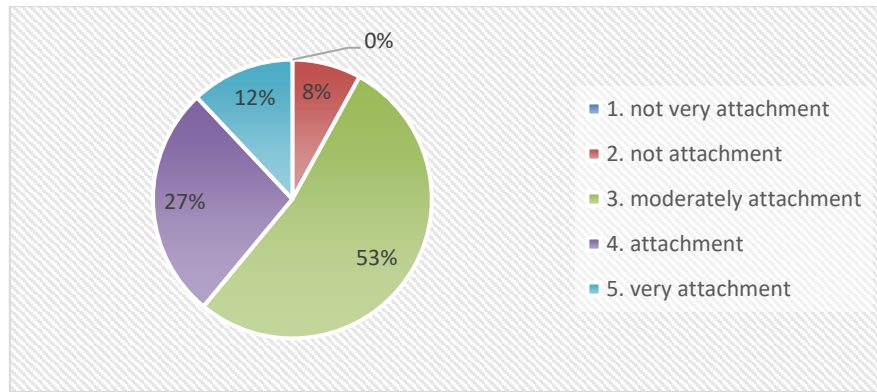
**Figure 2. The father gives touch, such as a hug, to strengthen the child**

Illustrates the frequency and percentage of fathers who provide touch, such as hugs, embraces, strokes, or pats, to strengthen their child, based on a scale of 1 to 5. This scale measures how often fathers provide such touch, with 1 meaning "never" and 5 meaning "always". None chose scale 1 (0%). A total of 14 fathers (8%) were on scale 2, 91 fathers (53%) were on scale 3, 47 fathers (27%) were on scale 4, and 20 fathers (12%) were on scale 5. The totals show full distribution of the frequency of fathers providing touch to strengthen their children, with the majority of fathers being on scales 3 and 4.
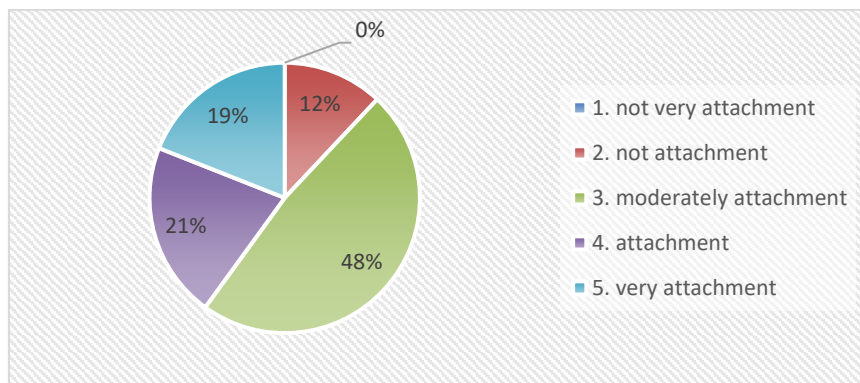
**Figure 3. Father calls the child by his favorite nickname**

The data shows the frequency and percentage of fathers who call their children by nicknames on a scale of 1 to 5. This scale measures how often fathers use nicknames, with 1 meaning "never" and 5 meaning "always". Out of 172 respondents, no one chose scale 1 (0%). A total of 21 fathers (12%) were on scale 2, 82 fathers (48%) on scale 3, 35 fathers (21%) on scale 4, and 34 fathers (19%) on scale 5. This distribution shows that the majority of fathers tend to call their children nicknames fairly frequently, with scale 3 being the most common choice.
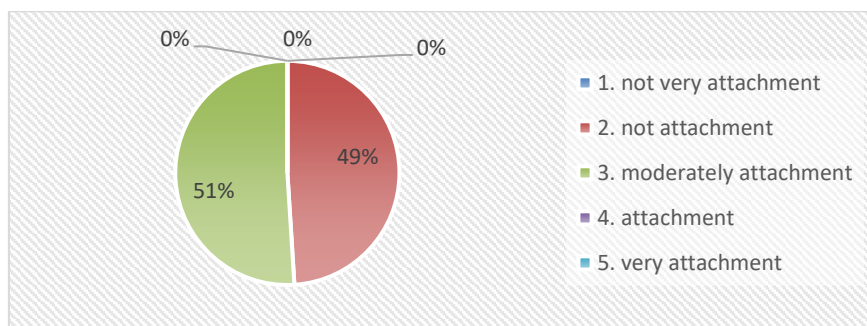
**Figure 4. Father invites children to do their hobbies or interests**

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Figure 4 shows the frequency and percentage of fathers who encourage their children to do their hobbies or interests based on the engagement scale. The scales used ranged from 1 to 5, but only two scales had data: scale 2 with 84 respondents (49%) and scale 3 with 88 respondents (51%). Scales 1, 4, and 5 had no respondents. The total number of respondents in this table is 172, which covers 100% of the entire sample.
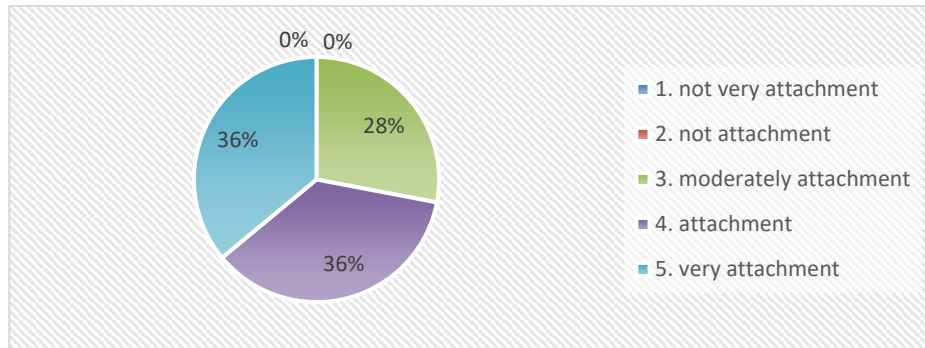
**Figure 5. Father, do not scold your children**

Based on Figure 5. Illustrates the frequency and percentage of the father's response scale that does not scold the child. The scale used ranges from 1 to 5, where scales 1 and 2 have no frequency or percentage (0%). Scale 3 showed 49 responses with a percentage of 28%, scale 4 had 62 responses with a percentage of 36%, and scale 5 showed 61 responses with a percentage of 36%. The total number of responses is 172, which is 100% of the analyzed sample.
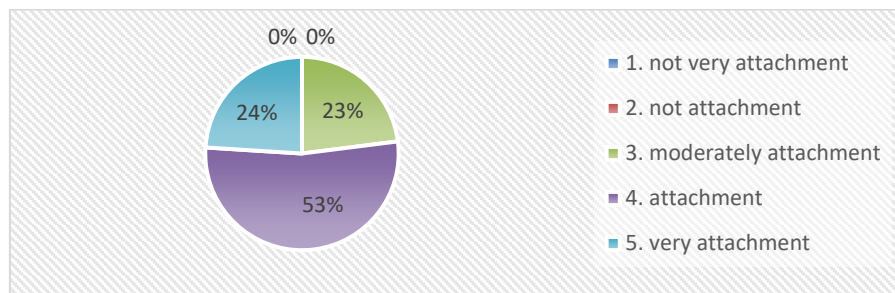
**Figure 6. Fathers help children when they have problems or difficulties**

Based on Figure 6 illustrates the frequency and percentage of the father's response scale that helps children when experiencing problems or difficulties. The scale used ranges from 1 to 5, where scales 1 and 2 have no frequency or percentage (0%). Scale 3 showed 40 responses with a percentage of 23%, scale 4 had 91 responses with a percentage of 53%, and scale 5 showed 41 responses with a percentage of 24%. The total number of responses was 172, which is 100% of the analyzed sample.
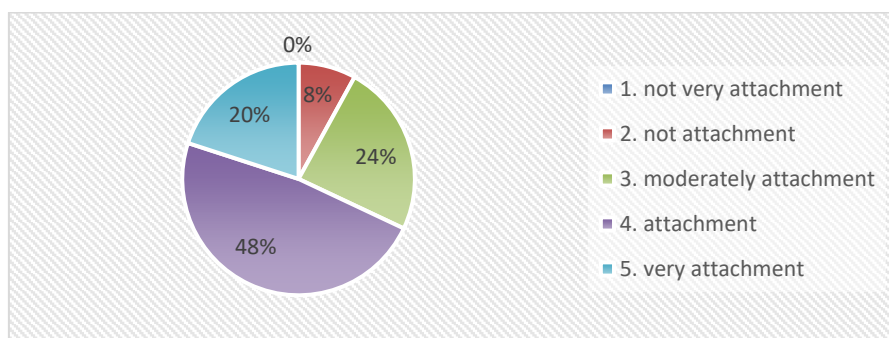
**Figure 7. Father is attending activities at my child's school**

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Figure 7 illustrates the frequency and percentage of the response scale of fathers attending activities at their child's school. The scale used ranges from 1 to 5, where scale 1 has no frequency or percentage (0%). Scale 2 showed 14 responses with a percentage of 8%, scale 3 had 42 responses with a percentage of 24%, scale 4 showed 82 responses with a percentage of 48%, and scale 5 had 34 responses with a percentage of 20%. The total number of responses is 172, which is 100% of the analyzed sample.
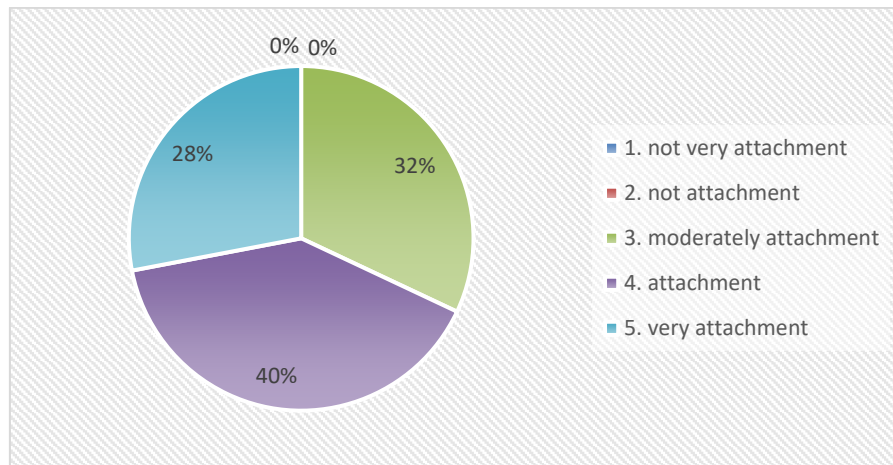
**Figure 8. The father is ready to help when the child is having difficulty**

Figure 8 illustrates the frequency and percentage of respondents based on the scale of fathers' readiness to help children when experiencing difficulties. On scales 1 and 2, no respondents chose, so the frequency was 0% for both scales. On scale 3, there were 55 respondents, or 32%. Scale 4 had the highest frequency with 69 respondents, or 40%. Scale 5 recorded 48 respondents, or 29%. The total number of respondents was 172, with a percentage distribution that gives an idea of the high readiness of fathers in helping their children when facing difficulties.
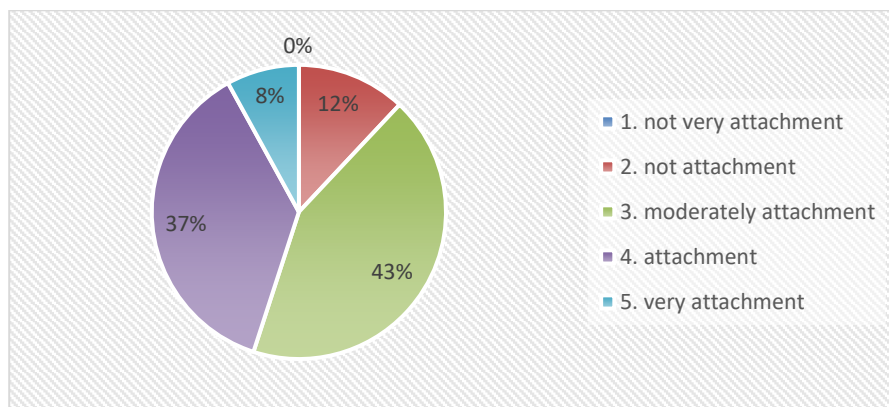
**Figure 9. Father helps the child recognize his environment**

Figure 9 shows the frequency and percentage of respondents based on the scale of the father's involvement in helping children recognize their environment. No respondents chose scale 1, so the frequency is 0%. Scale 2 was chosen by 20 respondents, or 12%. Scale 3, which has the highest frequency, was chosen by 75 respondents, or 43%. Scale 4 was followed by 63 respondents or 37%, and scale 5 by 14 respondents or 8%. The total number of respondents was 172, which shows the variation in the level of involvement of fathers in helping their children recognize their environment.

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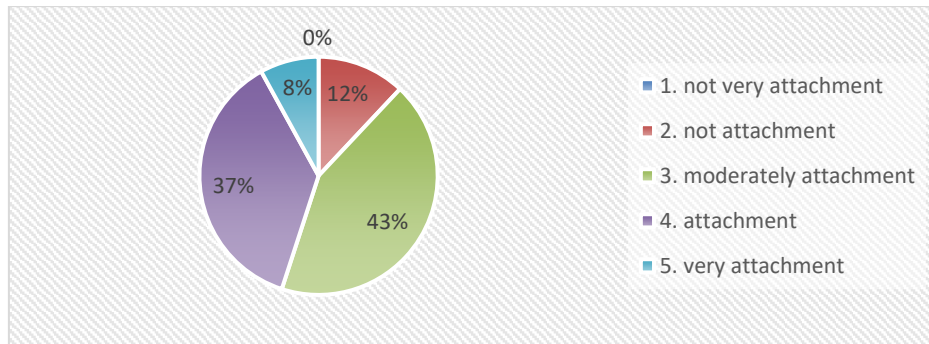
**Figure 10. Fathers provide opportunities for children to explore the world and learn from experiences**

Based on Figure 10. outlines the frequency and percentage of respondents based on the scale of providing opportunities by fathers for children to explore the world and learn from experience. No respondents chose Scale 1, so the frequency is 0%. Scale 2 was chosen by 20 respondents, or 12%. Scale 3, which had the highest frequency, was chosen by 75 respondents, or 43%. Scale 4 was chosen by 63 respondents, or 37%, while scale 5 was chosen by 14 respondents, or 8%. The total number of respondents was 172, showing the variation in the level of fathers' involvement in providing opportunities for children to explore the world and learn from experiences.
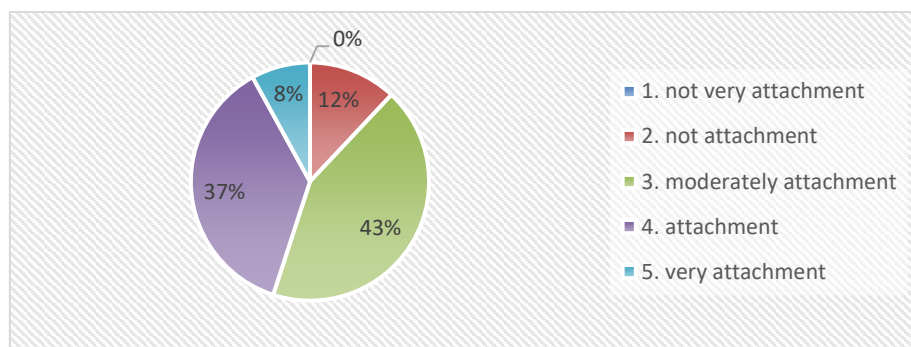
**Figure 11. Fathers providing emotional support helps children feel safe, to help build self-esteem**

Based on Figure 11. Outlines the frequency and percentage of respondents based on the scale of providing emotional support to help children feel safe and build self-esteem. No respondents chose Scale 1, so the frequency was 0%. Scale 2 was chosen by 20 respondents, or 12%. Scale 3, which has the highest frequency, was chosen by 75 respondents, or 43%. Scale 4 was chosen by 63 respondents, or 37%, while scale 5 was chosen by 14 respondents or 8%. The total number of respondents was 172, showing the variation in the level of the father's involvement
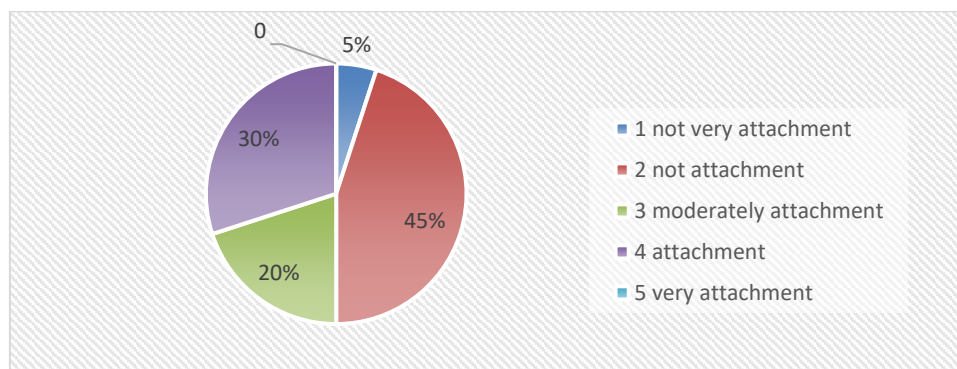
**Figure 12. Recapitulation of Data on Research Results on Father-Child Attachment**
Data source: Assessment Development Results

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The distribution of father-child attachment scores across five categories is shown in Figure 12. A low level of attachment to their fathers was indicated by the fact that the majority of children (45%) were classified as "not attached." Furthermore, 20% of children were classed as "moderately attached," suggesting a moderate level of attachment, and 30% of children were classified as "attached," reflecting a relatively healthy attachment. None of the children were found to be in the "very attached" category (0%), whereas 5% of the youngsters were classified as "very unattached." The different levels of father-child attachment in the sample are clearly depicted in this figure.

The outcomes of this study on father–child attachment demonstrate substantial diversity in attachment levels based on score intervals. A considerable proportion approximately 45% of youngsters fell into the “not attached” group, while none of the respondents achieved the “very attached” threshold. According to this frequency distribution, most father-child relationships are classified as lower to moderate attachment. The wide diversity of attachment experiences within the population under study is reflected in this distribution, which shows that respondents' perceptions of the formation of emotional relationships between dads and children vary. These results highlight the need for increased efforts to improve the quality of emotional ties between dads and young children, since they imply that father-child attachment among 5- to 6-year-olds in Parigi is typically below optimum.

From a pragmatic perspective, these results can be used as a basis for early childhood educators, child counselors, and parents to create programs that encourage emotional intimacy with increased father participation. For example, father-child activities at school, focused parenting courses for fathers, and tactics that motivate fathers to be actively involved in their children's everyday lives even when time is limited can all be put into practice (DeGarmo, 2020). According to the study, the majority of Parigi children between the ages of five and six show moderate to low levels of attachment to their fathers. This emphasizes the importance of improving the emotional relationships between fathers and their kids, especially with regard to trust, communication, and physical and emotional presence(Anggraini et al., 2022).

Based on the data indicating weak emotional attachment between fathers and young children, there is a clear need for policies that support the active involvement of fathers in child-rearing. Local governments, through relevant agencies, can design family-based parenting programs that not only engage mothers but also specifically target fathers. In addition, schools particularly early childhood education centers (PAUD), should be encouraged to regularly organize activities involving fathers, such as father-focused classes, father visitation days, or joint parenting workshops. Such initiatives are essential and should be supported by schools, village authorities, and sub-district administrations to strengthen emotional bonds from an early age and contribute to the development of a socially and emotionally healthier generation.

The findings of this study are consistent with attachment theory, as proposed by Bowlby and Ainsworth, which emphasizes that attachment is an emotional bond that fosters a sense of security and develops through consistent interactions between a child and their attachment figure. The attachment dimensions utilized in this study communication, trust, and alienation align with the attachment constructs outlined by (G. C. Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The observed variation in attachment scores illustrates how these elements manifest in father–child relationships. These findings reinforce the attachment theory advanced by Bowlby and Ainsworth, highlighting the importance of consistent interaction between children and their attachment figures in establishing a secure base. Thus, this study demonstrates that the quality of father–child interactions significantly influences the level of attachment formed, in line with established theoretical frameworks.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that the level of attachment between fathers and their children varies significantly among the respondents. The majority of children (45%) were categorized as “not attached,” followed by 30% in the “attached” category, 20% in the “moderately attached” category, and only a small portion (5%) classified as “very unattached.” Notably, none of the respondents were categorized as “very attached.” These findings indicate that emotional relationships between

fathers and children within the studied population exist at varying levels, with most falling into the moderate range.

Educators and parents, particularly fathers, can implement various strategies to foster closer relationships with their children. These strategies include engaging in shared play, building positive routines, and encouraging open communication. A stronger emotional bond between father and child can better prepare children to face academic and social challenges, ultimately supporting their long-term developmental outcomes.

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